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HAMPTON HISTORY MUSEUM

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Looking for evidence of the Grand Contraband Camp



Hampton History Museum Leads Effort to Excavate Contraband Camp Site

--Tour of dig site encourages public to track progress--

--19th-century Contraband community revealed through excavation, museum exhibit--

Hampton, VA- This week heavy equipment begins moving turf and top soil from a two-acre site located between Pembroke and Lincoln streets, where Armistead Avenue and Lincoln Street intersect, in Downtown Hampton. Known to be the site of the Grand

Contraband Camp during the Civil War following Union Major General Benjamin Butler's May 24, 1861 assertion that men treated as slaves by the Confederate army were to be considered contraband of war, the site has been consistently occupied since the 19th century, and served most recently as the site of the Harbor Square apartment community. [James River Institute of Archaeology](#), led by renowned local archaeologist Nick Lucchetti, will prepare the site and commence excavating by hand on May 21, in an effort to uncover artifacts for the Hampton History Museum. Hand excavation will take place May 22-June 13.

Docent-led tours of the dig site will be provided by Hampton History Museum beginning June 12 (an estimated three weeks after the beginning of the dig) on Thursdays and Fridays through the end of June. Tours will depart the history museum at 2:30, and will include museum exhibit "Toward Freedom: Hampton and the Contraband" and St. John's Church Cemetery. Tour admission is \$10. The dig serves as an excellent complement to the Hampton History Museum-produced Contraband exhibit located on the museum's second floor, included in the general admission and tour price. The exhibit continues through June, 29, 2014.

While the public is not able to participate in excavation of the site, the museum will use the dig as an opportunity to educate about the Contraband community and the importance of the archaeology process, and the public is encouraged to track the dig's progress. The site has been inhabited continuously since Grand Contraband was established. If a significant amount of items is found, the history museum will consider a second excavation phase. An adult archaeology club is being established by the museum, based on numerous requests following the success of the museum's Junior Archaeology Club. Both clubs will have an opportunity to engage in the excavation.

"It will be challenging. The time period of artifacts found won't necessarily be clear when they are unearthed," said Luci Cochran, director of the Hampton History Museum. "The site is a living laboratory."

"The fact that Hampton is looking is important. We're just not certain what the outcome will be," said Cochran.

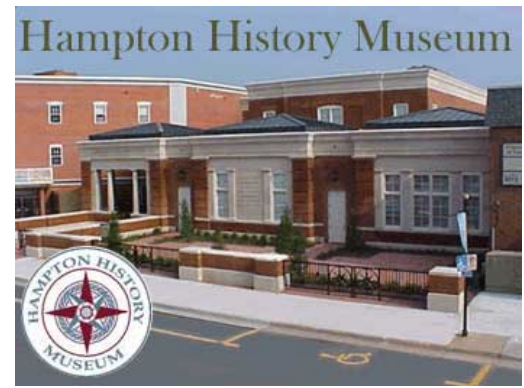
The Hampton History Museum is located at 120 Old Hampton Lane in downtown Hampton, Virginia. There is plenty of free parking in the garage across the street. For more information call 757-727-1610, visit www.hamptonhistorymuseum.org, or like Hampton History Museum on Facebook.

IMAGE:

Caption: Contraband cabins are spread across Hampton. An arm of Hampton Creek today mostly filled in is at the left-center, while the ruined hulk of St. John's Church lies under the large trees in the middle distance. The dirt road in the center may be King Street, while Queen Street threads almost invisibly from the image's left side past the shell of the church. A large number of cabins can be barely made out beyond the trees along the horizon. Slat fences form one of the most striking features. Photograph, 1864. Library of Congress.

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